

Bethany Deaconess Hospital
237 St. Nicholas Avenue
Brooklyn
Kings County
New York

HABS No. NY-5731

HABS
NY

24-BOOK
47-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BETHANY DEACONESS HOSPITAL

HABS No. NY-5731

HABS
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24-BROK
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Location: 237 St. Nicholas Avenue
Brooklyn, Kings County, New York

USGS Brooklyn Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 40° 42' Latitude, 73° 55'
Longitude

Present Owner: Wyckoff Heights Hospital Society
374 Stockholm Street
Brooklyn, New York

Present
Occupant: None

Present Use: Building is abandoned and sealed. It will be
demolished in the fall of 1985 to make way for
a federally-subsidized housing development for
the elderly (HUD Project #012-EH248-NY 36-T811-052).

Significance: The site of the Bethany Deaconess Hospital borders
on the Ridgewood Multiple Historic Resource Area,
established by both the New York State and National
Register of Historic Places in 1983. Although not
part of the Historic Resource Area, the architecture
of the Bethany Deaconess Hospital, suggestive of the
German Renaissance style, is the only example of
this type in the community. It is also the only
building with a Dutch gable roof.

Constructed in 1901 by the Eastern German Conference
of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Bethany Deaconess
Hospital was one of the first health care facilities
built to serve the growing German immigrant population
of the Wyckoff Heights section of Brooklyn. The
building was the original hospital structure in a
complex that came to include ten other buildings,
most of modest size.

The entire Bethany Deaconess Hospital complex was
purchased from its Methodist founders by neighboring
Wyckoff Heights Hospital in 1966. It continued to
function as the "Bethany Pavillion", housing non-
surgical patients, laboratories, out-patient facilities
and offices until 1974. Since that time, the entire
Bethany Deaconess complex has been vacant and unused.

The vacant hospital covers approximately one third
of the area on the largely residential block formed
by St. Nicholas Avenue, Cypress Avenue, Greene Avenue

and Bleecker Street. The residential dwellings along Bleecker and Greene, though not contiguous with the original hospital building, date from the early years of this century, and are of predominantly brick, row-house-type construction.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Building Department permit filed July 2, 1901. Building dedicated and opened on September 16, 1902.
2. Architect: John Boese, a local architect who had offices in lower Manhattan and Long Island City, Queens during the first decade of the century. He is known to have also been the architect of three New York City-area churches, (according to Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900, 1979, index), one on Liberty Avenue in Brooklyn, one in Patterson, New Jersey, and the other on West 55th Street in Manhattan, all of which were built within a few years of the Bethany Deaconess Hospital. Little information on the architect or his work is available.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the City Register, Borough of Brooklyn Municipal Building, Brooklyn, New York.

1901 Deed, June 11, 1901 recorded in Liber 30, page 55, from Louis Fink to Bethany Deaconess Society of Eastern German Conference of Methodist Episcopal Church.

1901 Deed, June 11, 1901 recorded in Liber 30, page 53, from Peter Wyckoff to Bethany Deaconess Society of Eastern German Conference of Methodist Episcopal Church.

1966 Deed, December 28, 1966 recorded in Volume 325, page 374 from Bethany Deaconess Hospital Society to Wyckoff Heights Hospital Society of Brooklyn.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Building department records fail to indicate whether a particular "builder" or "contractor" bore major responsibility for the construction of Bethany Deaconess Hospital. The fact

that architect John Boese acted as construction superintendent was noted, however.

Although the actual names of tradesmen and suppliers were not recorded, it is probable that several of the major contractors and suppliers working in Bushwick and nearby Ridgewood, Queens at that time were in some way involved. The Evergreen Steam Stone Works, located on Myrtle Avenue at Decatur Street, cut most of the stone used in stoops and applied ornament on facades in the Bushwick community during its building boom from 1900-1920. The firm had been founded by German immigrant stone masons in 1890, and produced both machine cut and hand carved stone work.

The ornamental wrought iron balconies adorning the Bethany Deaconess Hospital were most likely created by one of the two local firms which supplied local builders. Strubel's Ridgewood Iron Works, located on DeKalb Avenue, at Wyckoff Avenue, was founded in 1870 by John Strubel. Charles Strebel and Sons, which was located on Myrtle Avenue, was founded in 1901 by Charles Strebel.

The largest masonry contracting firm in the area at that time was Reilly and MacDonald, who employed over 50 masons during the years of intensive building activity in Bushwick and its surrounding neighborhoods. Reilly and MacDonald are thought to have laid most of the bricks in the Ridgewood-Bushwick developments completed in the early 1900's. (Taken from report of Greater Ridgewood Restoration Corp. to National Register of Historic Places, 1983)

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans were on file with the Brooklyn Building Department, or available from any other source. An "as is" rendering of the building as it presently exists is part of this HABS submission.
6. Alterations and additions: During construction, architect John Boese reversed his original plan to construct the foundation walls of brick, and filed an amendment changing the material to two-foot thick stone. The amendment was dated October 23, 1901, and was approved.

While no radical changes were made to the building itself, a hospital complex comprising ten other buildings grew up around the original hospital. Walls were removed between the original building and a second, adjoining

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building added in 1920 immediately to its left on St. Nicholas Avenue. In the early 1960's, a seven-story brick and concrete building was opened adjoining the rear extension of the original structure. Walls were removed from the original building to allow access.

B. Historical Context:

To serve the growing population of German immigrant families migrating east on Long Island into the Bushwick community at the turn of the century, the Eastern German Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church formed the Bethany Deaconess Society in 1900 to begin raising funds for the construction of a hospital. Devout Methodists from throughout New York and New Jersey contributed to the campaign to build the \$18,000 Bethany Deaconess Hospital at 237 St. Nicholas Avenue. (from the Society's Annual Report of 1916)

The Hospital opened on September 16, 1902 and soon a pattern of fine care, especially in its crowded maternity ward, was established. The Hospital was staffed, in part, and administered by a community of "Deaconesses", Methodist Episcopal Churchwomen vowed to a life of service and prayer analogous to the "nursing sisters" who historically have staffed and operated Catholic hospitals. The Deaconesses, who remained at Bethany Deaconess Hospital throughout its sixty-four years as a private health care facility and mission of the Methodist Church, were led and supervised by "Sister Meta", one of the original Deaconesses who remained at Bethany for years.

At the time it was sold to Wyckoff Heights Hospital in 1966, the Bethany Deaconess Hospital had grown to be a complex of eleven hospital buildings and three utility sheds. Among the buildings added were a nurses' home in 1906; several frame, residential-type structures to serve as doctors' offices and clinic space, and a modern, seven story all-purpose building in the early 1960's. With the addition of the seven story building, the capacity of Bethany Deaconess during its final years grew to 102 beds.

The Wyckoff Heights neighborhood of Bushwick grew up around the Hospital. By 1920, attractive brick row houses lined Bleecker Street and Greene Avenue, running alongside the Hospital. Commercial activity grew and public trolleys reached the neighborhood in the years immediately following the establishment of the Hospital.

Architecturally, the original Bethany Deaconess Hospital building stands out from the surrounding community. The German Renaissance-type structure, while complementing the neighboring row houses with its modest scale, is altogether unlike the rows of simple, unadorned, light-colored brick row houses that comprise the adjacent residential streets.

From 1966 to 1974, Wyckoff Heights Hospital, which had purchased Bethany Deaconess in late 1966, continued to operate Bethany as an extension of its own facilities. The "Bethany Pavillion", as Bethany Deaconess was known during that time, was closed in 1974. Since that time, the entire complex has been vacant and out of use. As a consequence, all of the Bethany buildings have been thoroughly vandalized. Little remains of the exterior ornamentation, and nothing at all is left of the interior fixtures, woodwork or systems in the original hospital building. All 11 buildings are now sealed with concrete.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is constructed of brick in the German Renaissance style. Its seven Dutch gable dormers and wrought iron balconies are unique in the architectural context of the Wyckoff Heights community. The building is two and a half stories with an attic. It is of non-fireproof construction.
2. Condition of fabric: The present condition of the building fabric is very poor. The structure has been repeatedly vandalized in addition to the deterioration caused by eleven years of abandonment. All fixtures, windows, doors, woodwork, the central stair, and systems have been removed. The stoop has been destroyed, and the facade is cracked in several places.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Front: 58'-8", Depth: 71'-10", 2½ stories with attic, 35' at highest point. Rear extension of one story: width: 18'-8", depth: 15'-10".
2. Foundations: Cellar is five feet deep. Concrete poured directly on excavated soil. Walls are stone, two feet thick.
3. Walls: Walls are plaster over brick piers.

4. Structural system, framing: Steel girders, cast iron columns, spruce floor beams and frame.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Wrought iron balconies serve as fire escapes; dormer windows instead of bulkheads to access roof; stone stoop.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and windows: Galvanized iron skylights (four). Seven Dutch gable dormer windows.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Peaked roof, slate and tin construction.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Galvanized iron cornices.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Seven Dutch gable dormers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See enclosed "as is" floor plans.
2. Stairway: Broad, curving, central stair with carved wood banister (removed by vandals).
3. Flooring: V.A.T. tile over hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paint on plaster (damaged). Building extension walls coped with tile coping.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Unknown (removed).
 - b. Windows: Dutch gable dormer windows, other windows removed.
6. Decorative features and trim: Unknown (removed).
7. Hardware: Cast iron radiators.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Hot water heating system, flues lined with pipe.

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- b. Lighting: Unknown (no record; fixtures removed).
- c. Plumbing: Unknown (no record; fixtures removed).
- d. Elevator: Original elevator, brick shaft.
- e. Dumbwaiter: Shafts are angle irons and fire-proof blocks.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building faces St. Nicholas Avenue at corner of Bleecker Street (southwest). Surrounding neighborhood is residential. Some commercial areas west on St. Nicholas Avenue. Setback is approximately thirty feet from curb. Ten additional hospital buildings and three small utility sheds complete the hospital complex and surround the original Bethany Deaconess Hospital building.
2. Historic landscape design: There is no landscape design of note. The hospital property is fully developed, with the only open space on the site being an overgrown, littered yard at the interior of the complex.
3. Outbuildings: 5 2-story residential buildings of brick and wood frame construction (circa 1920).
 - 1 5-story hospital building of brick (1920).
 - 1 7-story hospital building of brick and concrete (1960).
 - 1 3-story brick nurses' home (1906).
 - 1 1-story brick boiler house.
 - 1 2-story brick laundry.
 - 3 accessory sheds.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Not available. "As is" reproductions by Paul Heyer Architect, AIA, enclosed.

B. Early Views:

Annual Report-1916, Bethany Deaconess and Hospital Society of the Eastern German Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (United Methodist Society Interchurch Center).

Forty-Eighth Annual Report, Bethany Deaconess and Hospital Society of the Eastern German Conference of the Methodist

Church.

C. Interviews:

Nancy Dennis, Secretary to the Archivist, the General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

Adeline Hackl, Secretary, United Methodist City Society, Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1922, New York, New York.

Barry Schiff, Vice President for Operations, Wyckoff Heights Hospital, 374 Stockholm Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Arthur Konop, Director, James A. Kelly Institute for Local and Historical Studies, St. Francis College, 180 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, New York.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Annual Report - 1916, Bethany Deaconess and Hospital Society of the Eastern German Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (United Methodist Society Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, New York).

Brooklyn Eagle, September 17, 1902, Brooklyn, New York (Long Island Historical Society, 128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, New York).

Department of Buildings, City of New York, Borough of Brooklyn, Municipal Building, Room 816, Brooklyn, New York.

Eagle Almanac, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Vol. XVII, No. 1, Brooklyn, NY, 1902, pp.259-261. (James A. Kelly Institute for Local and Historical Studies, St. Francis College, Brooklyn, New York).

Eagle Almanac, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Brooklyn, NY, 1902, pp. 304-309. (James A. Kelly Institute).

Forty-Eighth Annual Report, Bethany Deaconess and Hospital Society of the Eastern German Conference of the Methodist Church, 1948. (United Methodist Society

Interchurch Center).

Francis, Dennis Steadman, Architects in Practice in New York City 1840-1900, New York, NY: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979. (New York Public Library).

Ridgewood Times, September 17, 1902, Ridgewood, New York. (Long Island Historical Society).

2. Secondary and published sources:

Hutter, Walter J. et al, Our Community, Its History and People, Ridgewood, NY: Greater Ridgewood Historical Society, 1976.

Report of Greater Ridgewood Restoration Corp. to National Register of Historic Places, 1983.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

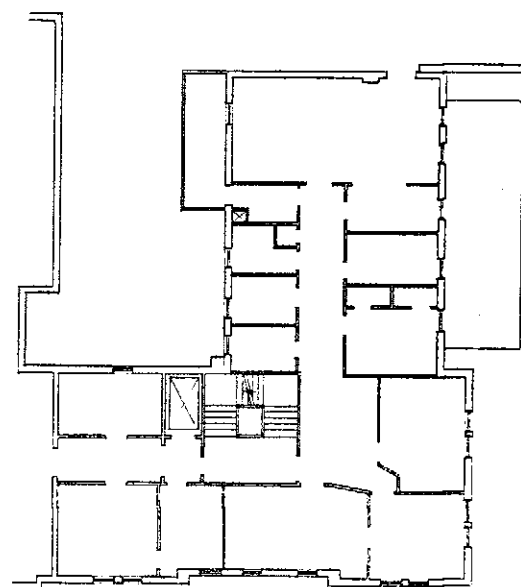
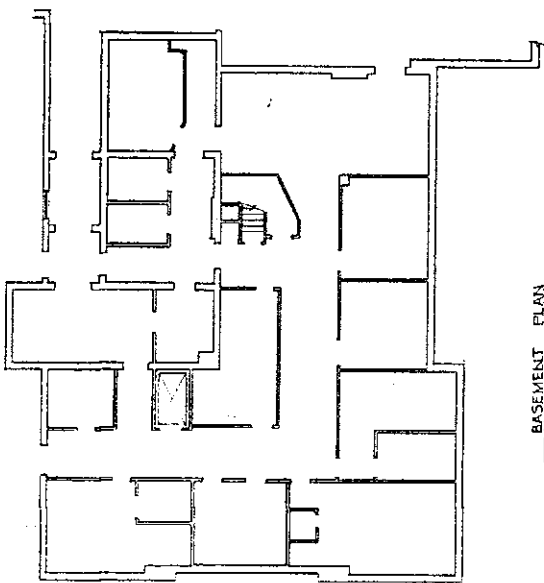
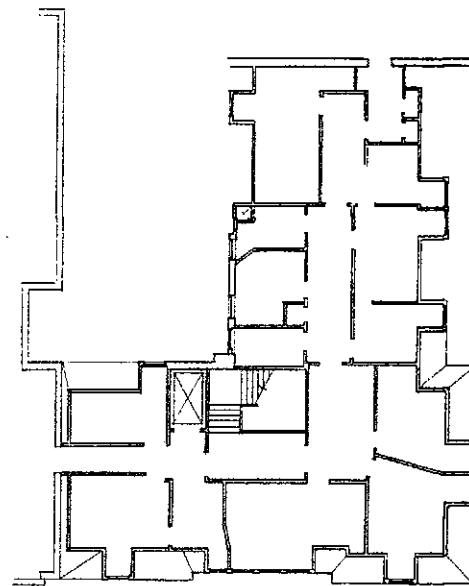
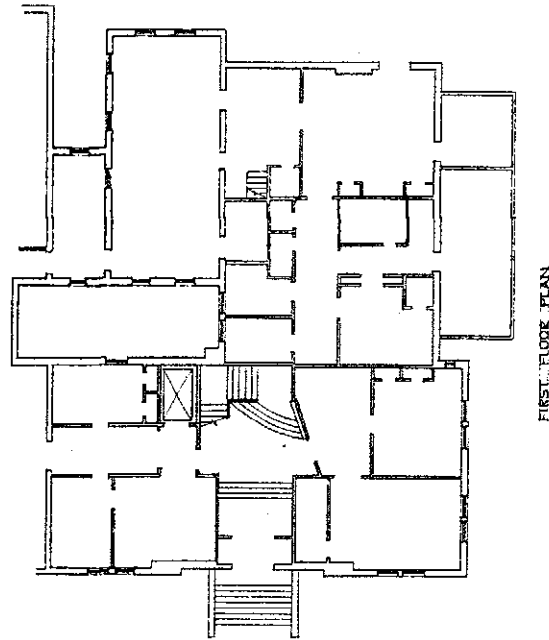
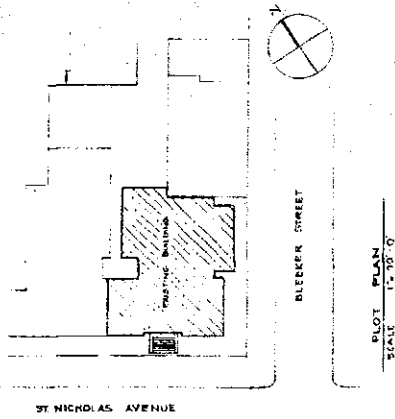
We have explored all known sources, including insurance companies, community residents reached through newspaper advertising, local newspaper files, Methodist Church archives, local historical societies, Wyckoff Heights Hospital records, libraries and municipal records.

Prepared by: Rosanne Haggerty
Program Specialist
Brooklyn Catholic
Charities
June, 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project requiring the demolition of the Bethany Deaconess Hospital is the construction of 150 units of subsidized housing for the elderly under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 202 program. The H.U.D. project number is : No. 012-EH248 NY36-T811-052. The Bethany Apartments for the Elderly project is being sponsored by Catholic Charities, Diocese of Brooklyn. Rosanne Haggerty, a program specialist with the housing office of Catholic Charities prepared the written documentation; Stephen Senigo, a professional photographer, prepared the photographic documentation, and Paul Heyer, AIA, the project architect, prepared the graphic documentation. The documentation was gathered and prepared during the late winter and spring of 1985.

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237 ST. NICHOLAS AVE. BROOKLYN KINGS COUNTY NY			
EXISTING FLOOR PLAN	SCALE	DATE	YEAR
HABS NO. NY-5731	1" = 10' 0"	1937	1937
PAUL HEYER ARCHITECT			
317 WEST 97TH STREET N.Y. CITY 10025			